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PERSONAL CHARACTER AS A RESPONSIBILITY OF CITIZENSHIP.

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BEING THE SECOND OF THE LECTURES IN THE DODGE COURSE DELIVERED AT YALE UNIVERSITY.

I endeavored to develop in my last lecture the thought that there were responsibilities resting upon every citizen of every nation by virtue of his citizenship, and that no such responsibilities were greater than those which rested upon a citizen of this republic. If it be true that the responsibility of an American citizen is greater than that of a citizen of any other nation, it becomes correspondingly important to know what action on his part such responsibility calls for. To say that an individual is responsible, and not define what his responsibilities are, to say that he owes duties and obligations and not make clear the nature and extent of those duties and obligations, is to leave the matter less than half disclosed. May he by a single act satisfy the full measure of his responsibility and relieve himself from all further obligations? If not, what must he do, and how often must he act? It is one of the weaknesses of our nature to desire to be rid entirely of obligations, or if not rid

entirely to discharge them by a single act. We would be benevolent, charitable, but would gladly give a thousand or more dollars in a single sum if thereby we could cancel all our obligations in that direction. We would be religious, but how many would fain limit their religion, like the putting on of a clean shirt and the wearing of best clothes, to Sunday? We all look forward hopefully to an entrance into heaven, but wish there was some kindly power who could sell us a ticket, receive the price and end the transaction at once. This having evermore over us a responsibility which never fails in its demands, and which continues until our latest breath, is something from which we gladly turn. So I wish to impress upon you this afternoon the thought that the responsibility of a citizen is something which, like the heart-beat, stays with him through life, the care of which is essential to his own highest development, and in the constant recognition of whose obligations is alone found the successful life of the nation. And in order to develop this thought I must notice some of the many obligations which rest upon the citizen, and some of the duties imposed upon him. I use the plural nouns because it is a mistake to suppose that there is but a single obligation or a single duty to be performed. No one can say "I have voted at every election, and in so doing I have discharged my entire duty to the republic," or "I have served faithfully as a soldier in the army, and so have fulfilled the whole measure of my obligation to the nation," any more than a parent can say "I have fed my child, and thus have discharged the full measure of my duty to him."

The first matter which I shall notice is what may be called the obligation of personal character. In other words, each citizen owes to the nation the duty of maintaining in himself a high, clean, moral character. His personal morality is a debt to the nation. Indeed, it is a part of the nation's morality. I mention this first because it is of primary importance, an obligation which is binding upon all citizens, and binding at all times, and in all places. There is no break or cessation in its force, and there are no conditions or circumstances under or by which any citizen is released from its demands.

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It may be said that character is a personal matter, that the maintenance of one which is free from stain is the discharge of a duty to one's self, or, at most, only to one's family and

friends, or to God. I do not question the force of the obligation in all these directions, but I assert that in addition thereto the making and keeping of a high and noble character is one of the duties of the individual to the nation, and to be numbered among the responsibilities of citizenship.

A nation may be regarded in a two-fold aspect. In the one it is to be viewed as standing over against the individual, an artificial entity separate and distinct from all its citizens, thus coming closely within the definition of a corporation, as given by Chief Justice Marshall; in the other, and a perfectly consistent aspect, it is to be regarded as an aggregation of individuals. In the one it is a unit; in the other a collection of units. In either case, the moral element is the bright coloring of the picture. We speak of international law as a body of rules regulating the intercourse of nations. In this the nation is an artificial entity—an incorporeal being—a unit among nations, one whose conduct is to be regulated by certain rules adopted by the family of nations. This individuality, this singleness of national life, is as true of this republic as of any other nation, and this whether we say The United States of America *are*, or The United States of America *is*. The one expression simply indicates the Federal system under which the nation exists. A nation in its dealings with other nations is bound to certain rules of conduct which it is universally conceded should be founded upon justice and righteousness. The declaration of scripture, "Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people," is a sound maxim of international law. Indeed, some writers have gone so far as to assert that such declaration is the foundation upon which that law rests, and that by it alone, and without regard to actual approval or practical recognition by the nations, may be determined whether a certain course of conduct has the sanction of international law. Be that as it may, the moral element in a nation's life, looking at it as one among many nations, is beyond dispute.

Again, while we look upon the nation in its relations to other nations and for the purpose of determining its international rights and duties as a unit, in the other aspect it is a mere assemblage of a multitude of individuals. As the nation is the aggregation of the lives and forces of all its citizens, so is its character the combined total of the character of those individuals. If all these are savages, the tribe or nation which is thus composed is itself a savage tribe or nation. If all are

civilized and enlightened, the nation is civilized and enlightened. In other words, the nation is not simply the numerical aggregation of so many individuals, but is the combination of all the mental and moral characteristics of those individuals. That which can be affirmed of all the citizens can with equal truth be affirmed of the nation. You cannot disassociate the character of the nation and the character of its citizens. You cannot have an ideally perfect nation whose citizens are thoroughly bad, and if all the citizens live up to the highest possibilities of their lives you may be sure that the nation of which they are citizens stands out before the world as one whose ideals are of the highest. A good man does not intentionally do a bad act. Ten good men acting together are equally honest, and so if all the citizens of a nation are animated by the one purpose the acts of the nation will likewise be above the plane of intentional wrong.

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No one can excuse himself from his duty to the State to establish and maintain a good personal character on the plea that he is but one of a great multitude, and therefore his single life and character count for little or nothing. Doubtless the influence of one bad man is more obvious in a small than in a large society. If a community were composed of but ten persons, of whom half were good and the other half bad, who would not expect to see the influence of the latter half making a powerful impression on the general life? While, on the other hand, if it were composed of a hundred and only five were bad, the predominance of the good would go far to establish the good character of the organized whole. But the presence of even a single bad man in any society is an influence for evil. It is a blot on its character. A single flaw in a diamond detracts from its worth, and although the great mass of the crystal is perfectly pure, yet the single flaw is always seen and discredits the value. If there be but one black sheep in a flock, every passer-by notices that sheep, and so a single bad man in a community becomes an obvious element of disgrace. Nor is it a mere question of appearance. It is not simply that there is a flaw—a black sheep. The influence of that man is constantly for evil. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump," and character is one of those potent things which, going out beyond the individual, touches for good or for ill all within its reach. No man liveth unto himself alone. We stamp our impress on the

immediate community in which we dwell, and through that community affect for weal or woe the great nation of which we are a part. The inexperienced, the unwary, all become more or less affected by a bad man's influence, and over the community as a whole the shadow rests. So no man can say he is but one in a thousand and it matters not that he is vile, that his character is bad, for not only will his bad character cast a shadow, but also will his influence reach and demoralize far and wide.

But one may say, "This is all very true of those who are rulers, who hold the offices, who are the leaders in society, whose opinions are quoted, whose power is felt, but as for me, I live an unnoticed life, and therefore what difference does my character make in the national life." It is undoubtedly true that the higher the position a man holds, and the greater the influence he possesses, the more important is his good character to the community. All appreciate this. Corruption in the President or venality in the Supreme Court would be a terrible blow to the nation's good name. Licentiousness, if any exists, on the part of the nation's representatives, is carefully concealed; and Mr. Roberts, of Utah, appreciates the fact that even a Congressman is not permitted to have more than one wife at a time. High position carries with it added responsibility. "*Noblesse oblige.*" Of him to whom ten talents were given, ten talents additional were required. Yet it is equally true that he to whom a single talent was given was not excused for leaving that talent idle. No one, however humble, can relieve himself from responsibility. He may be but one out of many, but he is one, and contributes to make up the general character. He pours his breath into the social atmosphere, and if that breath be poisonous he to some extent contaminates the air. What would be the standing of this nation if only its presidents and judges were pure and honest? Does any one suppose that the character of the nation would be determined by the few holding those positions? Indeed, how can we expect that they who occupy representative places will continue pure and honest if the great mass of the people are not? If the atmosphere in which these few live is filled with poison, can they escape its effect? Are they not in fact upheld and strengthened in good conduct by their surroundings of good character? Is not the integrity of our officials largely owing to the integrity of the American people?

As a nation we stand face to face with a great fact. The century and more of our national life has been lived in a career of self-development and with an isolation from other nations suggested by the words of wisdom in the farewell address of "the father of his country." We have stood aloof from the great events of the other hemisphere, endeavoring to maintain a position of equal justice to all, but of equal separation from all, content to uphold on this continent that which we call the Monroe Doctrine, the separation and consecration of this continent to those ideas of popular government which lie at the foundation of this nation's life. But we enter the new century under changed conditions. Commerce, whose mandate no law can stay, whose excursions no law can check, is bringing us, whether we will or no, into the great council of nations. The accumulated products of our territory are pouring into every quarter of the globe seeking a market. Our marvelous inventive genius, showing itself in wonderful mechanical contrivances, is looking beyond the bounds of the new continent for places in which that inventive skill may find some adequate compensation. Japan, one nation in the silent Orient, felt the touch of our national activity, and she passed out of obscurity into the great life of the world, and to-day stands as one of its magnificent factors. China, that great mass of an effete civilization, moving, yet moving slowly, even in the wondrous disturbances which now agitate it, turns with abundant faith to this nation for help in its time of distress. So, whether we wished it or not, we are forced into a position where our national life is not simply to be considered in reference to those within the nation but as an important and dominant fact in the great councils of the world. Shall we in these councils, and in our dealings with others, follow the Tallyrand notion that language is something to conceal rather than to express thought, or shall we stand as one nation at least whose purposes and life are measured by absolute truth and honesty—a nation which has no secondary and concealed motive in its dealings with others; a nation which always says what it means and means what it says, and strives to have every utterance in accord with the highest dictates of truth and justice?

Many of our citizens are to-day troubled by the fact that, as the outcome of the late war with Spain, we have taken distant islands with a large population of a character illy in accord with that of the Anglo-Saxon. We wonder what the outcome of this venture will be. Earnest discussion fills the

papers, the halls of Congress, and comes into the great tribunal of the nation. What are the limits of our power over those people, and what must be, in accord with our constitutional limitations, the measure of our duties to them? As one of that tribunal, before which some of those questions are pending, I can of course say nothing as to its decisions, but I may say that far above all questions of constitutional limitation, far above all the problems which courts may be called on to solve, is the hopeful and assuring thought that a solemn sense of responsibility fills the American thought. If they who today compose the great body of recognized American people shall lift their own lives up into the purity demanded by high character, if they shall measure their intercourse with the dwellers in these insular possessions by the rules of true manhood, it is a secondary matter what may be the decision of the courts, the policy of the Administration, or the action of Congress, for we may be sure that the nation will move, with or without constitutional amendment, along that great highway which is full of blessing to all within its jurisdiction, and to the great world which surrounds it.